

LAMONT SCHOOL DISTRICT

8201 PALM AVENUE, LAMONT, CALIFORNIA 93241 661-845-0751 FAX 661-845-0689

May 22, 2001

Magalie Roman Salas
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

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FCC MAIL ROOM

Re: **COMMENT** CC Docket No. 96-45 FCC 01-143

Ms. Roman Salas:

Lamont School District has contracted with Serban's Background Music, Inc., DBA Serban Sound Systems (SPIN 143006189) and they have been supplying internal connection systems and consulting services on Erate projects since Erate's approval. As a Consultant, Serban has assisted Lamont School District by advising us of rule changes within Erate, assisting us with the filing of Erate forms, writing bid specifications, and establishing technology plans and budgets. As a Service Provider, Serban is a Systems Integrator supplying Voice, Video, and Data systems for Lamont School District. Being both a Consultant and a Service Provider since Erate's beginning has given them a unique perspective of both the school's and service provider's concerns and problems.

Item 1

Lamont School District is very much in **support** of the Commission's plan to extend the service date from June 30th of each year to September 30th. We feel this benefits all schools because, as much as the SLD attempts to get Funding Commitment Letters out before June 30th of each funding year, almost invariably there are delays and/or "special circumstances" that push that notification to the schools to after June 30th of each year.

Lamont School District attempts to do most of our infrastructure work during the summer months to minimize the impact on students. Providing fifteen months to finish these internal connections would be a significant help to Lamont School District.

Item 2

Lamont School District is **opposed** to the Federal Communications Commission's proposal to revise the method for allocating discounts to schools and libraries under the federal universal service mechanism when there is insufficient funding to support all requests for internal connections. We are opposed for the following reasons:

1. Why is it that **all** schools and libraries receive Erate funding for their Telecommunications and ISP services, no matter what their discount rate is, but the FCC uses a different criteria for internal connections? It appears to Lamont School District that, if the FCC's position is that the "most needy" school has

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priority status, then that priority status should remain the same for all three "buckets"; Telecommunications, ISP, and Internal Connections. If the intent is to get these funds into the hands of the "most needy" schools and libraries, why will an affluent and/or "rich" school district get priority access to the 2.25 billion dollars by asking for Telecommunications and/or ISP funding? One possible more equitable solution would be to prioritize the entire 2.25 billion dollars to the highest priority schools, not just the "internal connections" portion.

2. If the new policy is to place an even higher priority on those schools that have the highest discount rate, then why is the FCC considering funding an 89% school who did not request services last year over a 90% school (like all schools in Lamont School District) who received some funding last year?
3. It is unfair to change the rules after applications have been turned in. Had Lamont School District known during the Year #4 filing period that only those schools who did not receive Year #3 funding would be given consideration, we would potentially have not spent the thousands of dollars and expended man-hours to design, bid, and apply for this internal connections work. Had the FCC had made this decision before, or at a minimum during the filing period, Lamont School district could have avoided these costs.
4. Furthermore, Lamont School District's service provider, would not have taken the time and effort of bidding all four of our schools in bid Year #4 for internal connections projects that had received Year #3 funding. It costs hundreds of dollars to bid each and every Erate project. Every day they are forced to prioritize and decide which projects to bid. Our service provider already takes a gamble each time they competitively bid an Erate project. They win some but lose more than they win simply because it is a competitive bid. Serban Sound would have only bid those schools that did not receive Year #3 funding. You just can't change the rules after the game starts; you do it before the game starts.
5. What strategy will we use next year for filing our Form 470's and Form 471's? Are we to file each school in the district separately so they are assured the highest priority on their funding for their 90% schools, or do we apply as a district as an 87% application hoping to get the entire district covered giving our schools preference over those school districts who filed each of their schools separately? The recommendation for Lamont School District was to file each school separately until the Year #3 filing period came along and, at the urging of SLD staff, Serban Sound started recommending to Lamont School District that we combine all schools on one application to reduce the amount of paperwork SLD had to process. Changing the process in such a manner will cause both schools and service providers to loose confidence in the program. Why should a school invest the time and money to pursue Erate funding when there is a strong possibility that the rules will be changed again? Same with service providers.
6. It is a flawed assumption that since a 90% school received funding in Year #3 that they are less deserving than a 90% school that did not receive Year #3 funding based upon these reasons:
 - a. FCC rules are very specific that schools and libraries are only to request services they can pay for each year. Therefore we have "phased" our construction asking for only that portion of their internal connections that we need the most each year and prioritize additional components or parts of the network each year that we feel we can fit into our budget. Lamont School District has a four-year plan to finish our internal connections project. If the FCC was to look at a typical school Technology Plan you

will notice that schools build their networks in steps, not all at once, and Lamont School District is no exception to this rule. Even if Erate is helping, very few schools would have the financial freedom to complete their internal connections projects in just one year.

- b. Some of the network operating systems suppliers such as Novell require yearly licensing fees.
- c. As Lamont School District grows we will be adding portable classrooms almost every year, if not every year. Because of the way the State of California funds school buildings, most of these portables are intended to be a permanent addition to the campus. At those portables that are destined to be a permanent part of the campus, we are required to install a permanent cabling solution. Additional network electronics (switches) are generally needed as well. There is no provision in the new rule making our service provider the ability to provide service to these new parts of the 90% campus. If the intent of the new rules was to only pay for internal connections to those 90% schools who did not receive internal connections last year, would not the students who happen to be in one of these portables that received funding last year still be in the highest priority funding? To our knowledge, there is no way USAC staff has the ability to identify this problem by going back and looking at the Year #3 applications.

Lamont School District recommends, if the FCC determines that they must impose rules that a school or school district cannot receive internal connections over two simultaneous years that they limit that restriction to:

- 1. Schools and libraries cannot replace a server they purchased last year with a new server this year or an upgrade to that same computer unless it is to accommodate new portables or parts of the campus not already previously wired.
- 2. Schools and libraries cannot replace or upgrade network electronics, PBX, or video systems they purchased last year with newer or faster equipment this year unless it is to accommodate new portables or parts of the campus not already previously wired.
- 3. Schools and libraries cannot replace wiring that they installed last year with new wiring this year but could add new wiring to those portions of the campus that have not previously been wired.

This entire problem would go away if the FCC would fund this program at a level that is actually required to accommodate the need. This new rule making process has only come about because thousands of schools all across the country need internal connections work, no matter what their discount rate is.

Parity is a huge issue within a Lamont School District and other school districts. How is a school superintendent supposed to tell the pupils, staff, and parents at their 90% school that their school is more deserving than the pupils, staff, and parents of a 80% neighboring district down the street

Realizing that this whole situation only exists because there is not enough money to do what is needed, we understand the FCC is struggling with the most efficient way to use the money that has been appropriated. We understand there needs to be priorities because of the lack of adequate funds. Because of our reasons listed above, Lamont

School District recommends that the rules used in Years 1-4 not be changed. We recommend the FCC institute either the proposed rules, or either some of the changed rules we have recommended or those that others have recommended starting in Year #5, not Year #4.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James R. Bates". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

James R. Bates, Superintendent
Lamont School District
jabates@zeus.kern.org

cc: Sheryl Todd
Accounting Policy Division
Common Carrier Bureau
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, S.W., Room 5-B540
Washington, D.C. 20554
Three Paper Copies
One Diskette

International Transcription Services, Inc.
1231 20th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037
One Diskette

Ms. Gina Mahoney
Office of Congressman Calvin Dooley
1201 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515